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President: Mr. Kerim ..... (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia)

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Agenda item 8 (*continued*)

General debate

The President: I now call on Her Excellency Ms. Tzipi Livni, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Israel.

Ms. Livni (Israel): Three thousand years ago, the people of Israel journeyed from slavery in Egypt to independence in the land of Israel. The Bible tells us that on their voyage to liberty they made a crucial stop and received the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai.

As the General Assembly gathers this year, the Jewish people recall that historic journey by marking the festival of Sukkot. And every year, at this time, our people remember that the long march to freedom requires the acceptance of humanity's basic values.

For 60 years, since the rebirth of our State in our ancient homeland, with Jerusalem at its heart, we have not lost sight of this principle. The core values of tolerance, coexistence and peace that lie at the heart of every democracy must be protected within societies and promoted between them. This is the calling of our generation.

The conflict in our region is driven by those who reject these core values — those who seek power without responsibility, those whose aim is not to realize their own rights but to deny those rights for others. At its heart, this is a conflict not about territory, but about values.

There is, of course, a territorial dimension to our dispute. We know this and, as we have proven in the past, we are prepared for the territorial compromise that lasting peace entails. But we also know, especially after withdrawing from Lebanon and Gaza, that territorial withdrawal by itself will not bring peace unless we address the core clash of values that lies beneath the conflict.

Israel may be on the front lines of this battle, but it is not our fight alone. This is a global battle. The notion that this battle is a local one, limited to isolated regions, collapsed in this city with the twin towers on a September morning six years ago. Today, it is clear that the extremists are engaged in a bloody war against civilians and communities, against hearts and minds, in every corner of the world.

And it is clear, too, that the Middle East conflict is not the cause of this global extremist agenda, but a consequence of it. Yes, it is up to the parties in the Middle East to settle their political conflict, and Israel, for its part, desires to do so. But for success to be genuine and lasting, you, the nations of the world, need to be partners in a shared global struggle against the extremism and terror that feed conflict, for your sake, not just for ours.

It is in this spirit that I would like to speak today about resolving our particular conflict, but also about

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the wider battle being waged today — the battle that affects us all. This battle is global, not just because it targets civilians everywhere, but also because the extremists have taken aim at the fundamental pillars of every modern society — namely, democracy, tolerance and education. These are the new battlefields of the twenty-first century, and it is in these arenas, more than any other, that the future of our world will be decided.

I believe in democracy. I believe in its extraordinary power to produce free and peaceful societies founded on respect for human rights. Democracy is a profound ideal, but it is also a vulnerable one.

Today, in different parts of the world, extremists, who are opposed to the very ideals of democracy, are entering the democratic process, not to abandon their violent agenda but to advance it. As a spokesman for Al-Qaida recently declared, "We will use your democracy to destroy your democracy". This should be a wake-up call for all of us.

It is time to reclaim democracy, and this begins by rejecting those who abuse it. Genuine democracy is about values before it is about voting. No true democracy on Earth allows armed militia or groups with racist or violent agendas to participate in elections. But some demonstrate a troubling double standard. There are some who insist on high standards in their own country but forget them when they look abroad. Violent extremists who could never run for office at home are treated as legitimate politicians when elected elsewhere. As a result, we empower those who use democratic means to advance anti-democratic ends. And we strengthen the forces of those who not only undermine their societies but also threaten our own.

Today, from this podium, I call on the international community to adopt at the global level what democracies apply at the national one: a universal set of standards for participation in genuine democratic elections. We need a universal democratic code that requires that all those seeking the legitimacy of the democratic process earn it by respecting such principles as State monopoly over the lawful use of force, the rejection of racism and violence and the protection of the rights of others.

The goal of such a universal code is not to dictate our values or to stifle legitimate voices with which we may disagree. Its goal is to protect core democratic values from those determined to use the democratic system against itself; and to make clear that participation in the democratic process is not just a right — it is also a responsibility.

I know that the temptation to engage with extremists can be strong. It may seem to promise stability and quiet. We may hope that by feeding the beast we can gradually tame it. As free societies, we pride ourselves, rightly, on our respect for difference and diversity. But we do a disservice to diversity when, in its name, we tolerate the intolerant.

Bitter experience has shown that buying off extremists is a short-term fix for which we will pay dearly in the long run. Instead, groups such as Hamas and Hizbullah must be presented with a clear choice between the path of violence and the path of legitimacy. They cannot have both. And it is this same stark choice that must be presented to the radical regime in Iran.

No responsible State disagrees that Iran is the most prominent sponsor of terrorism. It is a major source of instability and conflict in Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine and across the entire Middle East; and it is the enemy of Arab-Israeli coexistence. No one disagrees that Iran denies the Holocaust and speaks openly of its desire to wipe a Member State — mine — off the map. And no one disagrees that, in violation of Security Council resolutions, it is actively pursuing the means to achieve this end.

But there are still those who, in the name of consensus and engagement, continue to obstruct the urgent steps that are needed to bring Iran's sinister ambitions to a halt. Too many see the danger, but they walk idly by, hoping that someone else will take care of it. What is the value, we have to ask, of an organization which is unable to take effective action in the face of a direct assault on the very principles it was founded to protect?

It is time for the United Nations, and the States of the world, to live up to their promise of never again, to say enough is enough, to act now and to defend their basic values. It is also time to see this same kind of moral conviction in the Human Rights Council, so that it can become a shield for the victims of human rights, not a weapon for its abusers.

Israel has never tried to avoid genuine discussion of its human rights record. But so long as the Council

maintains its wildly disproportionate focus on Israel, it weakens the moral voice of the United Nations, and the price of this blindness is paid by the victims of human rights atrocities in Darfur and Myanmar and throughout the world.

There is no more accurate forecast for the future of a society than the lessons we teach our children. Unfortunately, in our region, we see children's television programmes in which Mickey Mouse puppets teach the glory of being a suicide bomber and a seven-year old girl sings of her dreams of blood and battle. Religion, rather than being a source of hope and spiritual healing, is abused as a call to arms, as God is dragged once again onto the field of battle.

It is time to reclaim religion from those who have made it a weapon rather than a shelter. It is time to reclaim education from those who use it as a tool of hate rather than an opportunity. As always, the most powerful form of education, and the hardest, is to teach by example. We cannot expect our younger generation to value what we are not prepared ourselves to protect and pay a price for. And there is a price to pay. From the leader who has to withstand public pressures. From the businessman who has to forgo economic opportunity. From the teacher and spiritual guide who must find the inner strength to teach truth and tolerance in a climate of extremism and hostility. At all levels of society, there is a price to be paid. But if we do not pay it today, we, and those who follow us, will face a far greater bill tomorrow.

These thoughts are in my mind as we seek, today, to advance the cause of Israeli-Palestinian reconciliation. Reconciliation is not about deciding who was right or who was wrong in the past, it is about sharing a common vision and a common responsibility for the future. In the last months, Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas have been engaged in a sincere and genuine effort to reach the widest possible common ground on political understandings. There is no substitute for the bilateral process. Failure is not an option, but it is for the parties themselves to define success. The foundation for true peace lies in the vision of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security. The world shares this vision, but it is also important that it clearly embrace the two core principles that emerge from it.

The first of these principles is: two States, two homelands. Just as Israel is homeland to the Jewish people, so Palestine will be established as the homeland and the national answer for the Palestinian people, including the refugees.

The second is: living side by side in peace and security. Just as a viable and prosperous Palestine in the West Bank and Gaza is an Israeli interest, so must a secure Israel be a Palestinian interest. The world cannot afford another terror State.

Guided by these principles, the parties can define a common border and turn the two-State vision from a dream into reality. To succeed, we must set our sights on a brighter future, while responding to the challenges of the present and learning the lessons of the past. As we make progress on concrete political understandings, it is just as important to change the reality on the ground — to show Palestinians and Israelis that the promise of peace exists in practice, not just on paper.

In recent months, Israel has taken tangible measures to create a better environment, and we are ready to do more. We know that Palestinian life is full of day-to-day hardship. We know also, and only too well, the burden of terror that Israelis bear and of our primary obligation to their security. Together, we can change this reality; we do not need to submit to it.

We are not naive. We can see the difficulties ahead and the enemies of peace that stand in our way. But practical progress is possible in those areas where there is an effective Palestinian Government that accepts the Quartet's principles and implements, alongside Israel, the existing Road Map obligations.

As the parties take the risks for peace, we look to the international community and the Arab and Muslim world to offer support, not to stipulate conditions. This support comes in many forms. It comes through economic and political assistance to the new Palestinian Government committed to coexistence and seeking to build the foundations of a peaceful and prosperous State. It comes through the clear endorsement of any political understandings reached between the parties. It comes through enhancing and deepening regional ties and cooperation between the Arab world and Israel, while in parallel we advance towards Israeli-Palestinian peace. And, finally, it comes by confronting those determined to prevent us from succeeding.

We must stand up to those who have no respect for human life or human liberty, those who hold

captive soldiers — Gilad Shalit, Udi Goldwasser and Eldad Regev — whose families are with us today and whose pain remains always in our hearts.

We must stand up to those who, after we withdrew from Gaza to give peace a chance, chose not to build but to destroy and who choose, on a daily basis, to target Israeli homes and kindergartens with their missiles.

And we must stand up to those who see democracy as a tool to advance hate, who see tolerance as a one-way street and who see education as a means of poisoning the minds of the next generation.

I believe that, despite all the obstacles, there is a new moment of opportunity and an alliance of interest that favours peace. Time is of the essence. We owe it to ourselves and to our children to find both the courage and the wisdom to make the right choices in the right way.

On this festival of Sukkot, Jews commemorate the journey from slavery to freedom by leaving their homes to live in fragile huts, like the shelters in which our ancestors lived on their way to the Promised Land. For 3,000 years, these temporary huts, open to the elements, have been a reminder that stability and security are ensured not only by the structures that we build but also by the values that we share. Perhaps it is for this reason that the Sukkah, this fragile shelter, has become the Jewish symbol of peace.

We turn to Jerusalem and say in our prayers every day: Spread over us the canopy of your peace. May it be in our days, and for all nations.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Jean Ping, Deputy Prime Minister in charge of Foreign Affairs, Cooperation, La Francophonie and Regional Integration of Gabon and former President of the General Assembly.

Mr. Ping (Gabon) (*spoke in French*): At the beginning of my statement, I would like to convey my sincere congratulations to you, Sir, on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-second session. Your election, Mr. President, constitutes undoubtedly significant recognition of your country for its prioritized and resolute actions with respect to implementation of the goals of the United Nations. But it is also, in personal terms, the successful outcome of a long and fruitful career as a diplomat and professor of international relations. In addition, in warmly congratulating you, I would like to assure you of the support my country, and of my own support, as you carry out your challenging and noble mission.

Allow me also to pay a well-deserved tribute to the President of the General Assembly at its sixty-first session, Her Excellency Ms. Haya Rashed Al-Khalifa, for the dedication, wisdom and skill with which she steered our deliberations, and particularly for her having led the necessary negotiations with respect to consideration and implementation of the important recommendations of the 2005 World Summit, which included reform of the Economic and Social Council and the Security Council.

To the Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, I would like to express my full encouragement as he carries out his functions at the head of the United Nations. The major reform that he has initiated in order to adapt the Organization to the needs of a world in constant change deserves everyone's support.

The theme for the general debate, climate change, which you have proposed for this year, is one of the primary concerns of the international community. The selection of this very theme by the Secretary-General as the framework for the discussion during the high-level debate that was just held is additional evidence of this. The Kyoto Protocol entered into force in 2005 and was a major historical milestone in the process of reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

With respect to trends in this phenomenon, every one can note that the goals set forth in the Protocol have yet to be fully achieved. We, therefore, need to do our utmost so that the Bali meeting in Indonesia, slated for December 2007, will be an opportunity to reach agreement on a common, global strategy in order to carry out more robust, collective action to mitigate significantly the negative effects of global warming.

Africa, which contributes least of all to the worsening of this phenomenon, is unfairly undergoing the serious consequences of it. Therefore, the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities needs to be applied. For its part, Gabon, whose forest is one of the essential components of the major Congo Basin, the second ecological lung of the planet after the Amazon, has unreservedly acceded to the Convention on Biological Diversity and has joined up in the fight against climate change.

Moreover, it has decided to devote 11 per cent of its territory to humankind, particularly by establishing 13 national parks. Recently, Lopé park was named as a new UNESCO world heritage site, and Gabon is prepared to go much further, because protection of the environment is an important pillar in the fight against poverty and an essential condition to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

As is evident, then, Gabon has undertaken considerable efforts in order to bring about greater protection of nature and of ecosystems. As a result, Gabon, together with other African countries, deserves to benefit from compensatory measures from industrialized countries, the main emitters of carbon dioxide.

From this standpoint, we urge the establishment of a stabilization fund to compensate for existing forest carbon stocks. We also would like to ensure that our forests are included in the carbon market mechanisms.

The General Assembly is the appropriate forum to discuss the major challenges that our world is facing. That was the strong message reaffirmed by the world's leaders when they assembled here for the September 2005 world summit. I welcome the fact that the major decisions taken at that time continue to drive the reform of our Organization.

The report of the High-level Panel on United Nations System-wide Coherence indicates the scope of the changes to be made to ensure greater effectiveness in implementation of the Organization's programmes. Here, I would like to pay a well-deserved tribute to the President of the Assembly at its sixty-first session for having launched intergovernmental consultations on this important issue.

The intensive activities of the General Assembly in recent years clearly attests to its central role as the principal representative organ and deliberative body responsible for setting the policies of the Organization. I have no doubt that you, Sir, will continue your efforts to strengthen the authority and primary role of the General Assembly. Similarly, one of the key measures that our Organization needs to bring about to improve the implementation and ensure the legitimacy of its decisions is reform of the Security Council. We will need to reach agreement in order to carry out this reform that is so important for the future of the United Nations.

This session is beginning in a complex and unstable international context that is marked by deep crises and many kinds of threats. The geography of the conflicts puts the spotlight on Africa and the Middle East.

In Africa, the situation in Darfur continues to be of concern. However, I would like to praise the efforts of the Sudanese Government, which has undertaken to participate in comprehensive peace talks on 27 October 2007 in Tripoli and to accept the principle of a ceasefire. Gabon, for its part, will continue to firmly support the national peace and reconciliation process in the Sudan. To this end, it welcomes the adoption by the Security Council of resolution 1769 (2007), authorizing the deployment of an Africa Union-United Nations hybrid force in the Sudan.

Furthermore, Gabon, which has for many years played a major role in the many negotiations on national reconciliation in Africa, supports the efforts undertaken by the European Union, particularly in protecting civilians and providing humanitarian assistance in Chad and the Central African Republic.

Specifically with regard to Chad, Gabon is currently facilitating peace and reconciliation talks among factions in that country.

The instability in Somalia for the past 15 years has negated any possibility of development. However, we need to mention the praiseworthy decision of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union in authorizing the deployment of a peacekeeping mission in that country.

With respect to the situation in the Middle East, more specifically, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, only concerted and sustained efforts based on the principle of two States, Israel and Palestine, coexisting in peace and security within secure and internationally recognized borders, can bring about a lasting and just settlement of this conflict.

My country endorses the idea of holding an international conference under the auspices of the Quartet, in order to relaunch the process of direct and constructive negotiations.

With respect to Lebanon, Gabon reaffirms its support for implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006).

With respect to the issue of international terrorism, I would like to commend the General Assembly's adoption on 8 September 2006 of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. While politically that is praiseworthy progress, nevertheless in legal terms we need to accelerate current negotiations in order to adopt a general counter-terrorism convention.

In the twenty-first century, threats to international peace and security are not limited solely to terrorism, war and international conflicts. Organized crime, civil violence, poverty, infectious diseases, natural disasters and weapons of mass destruction are also phenomena that can undermine the survival and foundations of the State as the basic element of the international system.

With respect to weapons of mass destruction, we need urgently to end the stalemate in the multilateral talks and to again place disarmament and non-proliferation issues at the forefront of the concerns of the international community. Our collective security depends on it.

On the HIV/AIDS pandemic, which severely affects many African countries, we need to act proportionately to the seriousness of this scourge. Furthermore, as was underscored in the political declaration on HIV/AIDS adopted in New York on 2 June 2006 as the outcome of the high-level meeting on that pandemic, the African countries are already allocating considerable financial resources to counter this scourge. Despite these efforts, our countries continue to face a shortfall of the resources necessary to achieving universal access to prevention, care and treatment by 2010. From this standpoint, Gabon welcomes the commitment taken by Group of Eight (G-8) in Germany, granting to Africa under development assistance the amount of $60 billion to fight malaria, HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis.

More than a year ago, our Organization gave itself a peacebuilding mechanism. Here, I would like to reiterate my appreciation of the work already done by the Peacebuilding Commission under the presidency of Angola, as well as by all of the members of the Commission for their efforts to devise an effective strategy bringing together all the national and international players involved in the processes of reconstruction in Burundi and Sierra Leone.

These countries, like all developing countries, need ongoing support from the international community, in accordance with the decisions taken under the Monterrey Consensus and reaffirmed at the 2005 World Summit. From this standpoint, the donor countries need to meet their pledges for assistance to developing countries, particularly in the areas of debt relief and opening their markets. To that end, the implementation of the Doha programme is an imperative for developing countries and will particularly enable countries in Africa to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015.

Similarly, we need to continue our brainstorming in order to identify and launch innovative sources for development financing. That is a priority objective for our countries, particularly since our resources are limited because of debt reimbursement, and this prevents us from responding effectively to development needs.

Here, I would like to pay tribute to the Paris Club, which has agreed to the principle of Gabon's buying back its debt. This agreement is key for Gabon in its legitimate quest for economic prosperity and social well-being.

It is in this spirit of renewed international solidarity and in effective partnership that we will be able to build a better world that respects the rights and dignity of the individual. This vision of the founding fathers of our Organization is also shared by my country and its President, El Hadj Omar Bongo Ondimba, who has always been able to work for the protection and promote human rights.

In keeping with these values, the Government of Gabon recently decided to abolish the death penalty and was a sponsor of the draft resolution on establishing a moratorium on the death penalty.

The United Nations has existed now for sixty-two years. From the cold war to the collapse of the Berlin Wall, it has been able to stand, together with the society of nations, the test of time. Unfortunately, however, and despite its long history, it has not been able to fully bring about the profound aspirations of liberty, equality and peace and justice, as expressed by the peoples of the world. The ongoing reforms need to be continued in order to enable the United Nations to be the mirror of diversity and human values.

The President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Hor Namhong, Deputy Prime Minister, and Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation for the Kingdom of Cambodia.

Mr. Hor (Cambodia): First of all, I wish to warmly congratulate His Excellency Mr. Kerim of the Republic of Macedonia for his election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-second session. I am confident that, under his able guidance, this year's session will be concluded with success. My appreciation also goes to Her Excellency Ms. Haya Rashed Al-Khalifa of the Kingdom of Bahrain for her brilliant leadership as the President of the sixty-first session, which produced significant achievements during the past year.

I am also very delighted to express my most cordial felicitations to His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon on his appointment as the United Nations Secretary-General. I have no doubt that under his wise leadership our world body will certainly become even more relevant and effective in responding to the challenges facing us in the twenty-first century.

Today, the world continues to confront a myriad of problems, ranging from peace and security to development, such as terrorism, regional conflicts, poverty, global warming, pandemic diseases, and so forth. These old and new emerging crises are indeed of global proportion, which require greater collective efforts by the world community. Therefore, as United Nations Member States, we have to share the common responsibility to address these issues more effectively for the sake of humanity.

Concerning weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), it is imperative that all States fully comply with the existing non-proliferation legal instruments in order to build a better and safer world for all, particularly the Non-Proliferation Treaty and the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, which laid down a long-term perspective toward achieving a non-proliferation regime for WMDs and preventing them from falling into terrorist hands, which could trigger the gravest of dangers to the international community.

Combating terrorism remains one of the top priorities for all Governments. No single country can deal with this unconventional threat without cooperation and concerted efforts, which should be further strengthened, particularly in the areas of education and information-sharing among law enforcement authorities and intelligence agencies.

In terms of security, we certainly cannot underestimate the illegal use and circulation of small arms and light weapons, as they can be an equally dangerous source of terrorism, violence and regional conflicts. In this context, Cambodia believes that the 2001 United Nations Programme of Action on Small Arms should remain the cornerstone for us all to work together to address this issue. In Cambodia, the Royal Government has developed a number of programmes, ranging from law enforcement on arms control to a programme of weapons for development, which has successfully led to the seizure and destruction of more than 200,000 small arms and light weapons.

Likewise, landmines still remain a serious threat to many nations in the developing world, especially those facing armed conflicts as well as those emerging from war. These "silent killers" have destroyed the lives of many innocent peoples and maimed countless others. Landmines are not only a security problem, but a humanitarian one, as the victims become permanently traumatized and physically handicapped, while their families suffer untold misery and spiritual and material deprivation. Landmines also have great impact on the economy and development, as the victims constitute a heavy economic and social burden for governments.

In Cambodia, the Royal Government is continuing its campaign of mine clearance by placing the demining operation in its national agenda, such as the Cambodian Millennium Development Goals and its "Rectangular Strategy". By July this year, more than 1.5 million landmines had been cleared. To share our own experiences with other countries that are also victims of landmines, Cambodia has dispatched 135 deminers of the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces to Sudan for demining action under the umbrella of the United Nations peacekeeping operation.

Everyone nowadays recognizes that climate change has become one of the most serious threats to humanity and affects the whole world in this new century. To reverse this negative megatrend, Cambodia is of the view that all countries should effectively implement the relevant United Nations instruments, especially the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and its Kyoto Protocol. We also call on countries that produce more greenhouse gases to commit to gradually reducing their emissions as much as possible.

At the same time, we need to develop and share know-how on bioenergy in order to take measures against global warming. In addition, we need to stop the deforestation in the developing countries by

assisting them with appropriate measures and resources.

In the framework of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN), our leaders will sign three important documents related to climate change, energy and environment during the coming ASEAN Summit in November of this year in Singapore. The signing of these declarations clearly reflects the political commitments that ASEAN, both collectively and individually, has attached to the issues of climate change.

Cambodia highly appreciates the United Nations initiative of convening the High-level Event on Climate Change here in New York on 24 September this year. We hope that that high-level meeting will lead to significant and concrete actions to address opportunely this very critical issue. However, I believe that a world summit under the auspices of the United Nations would keep climate change alive on the agenda of world's leaders. A global problem needs a global solution.

With regard to the regional situation, Cambodia welcomes the agreement reached in February this year through the process of the six party talks leading to the closing down of the nuclear facilities in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. This is a very positive step for peace, security and stability in the region. We hope that it will serve as an effective tool to pave the way for complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

Concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, we applaud recent active diplomatic initiatives, in particular the high-level talks between the Prime Minister of Israel and the President of the Palestinian Authority. We hope that those meetings and activities will lead to a definitive solution that establishes a State of Palestine, coexisting permanently and peacefully side by side with Israel, in order to end the killing and suffering of their peoples and for the sake of peace and security in the region.

With regard to the current appalling situation in Iraq, we applaud the recent decision of the United States to sizeably reduce the number of its troops in the country. However, the final and decisive solution will depend on how the Iraqi people reconcile among themselves. That is a sine qua non for ending the civil war in the country. Otherwise, I fear that chaos will ensue after the withdrawal of United States troops.

In the light of our own experience, I believe that the only option that will bring peace and stability to Iraq is national reconciliation, with a win-win policy for Shiites and Sunnis. But the main question that we should ponder is: who or which country can contribute to the initial process of confidence-building before any genuine reconciliation can be achieved?

This year marks the halfway point between the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in September 2000 and the target date of 2015. Notwithstanding some overall progress, developing countries have been experiencing difficulties in meeting the MDG targets. This is despite the outcomes of the many high-level meetings that have been taking place throughout the world aimed at improving economic development and the livelihoods of peoples in developing countries, such as the Monterrey Consensus and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation. In reality, however, the situation of developing countries has not improved much. What we need now is strong commitment and political will on the part of all, in particular those in the developed world, to ensure that globalization will be a globalization of wealth for all peoples living on this planet. I hope that that is not just a dream, but a goal for all.

The Royal Government of Cambodia has come up with its own MDGs, in addition to the rectangular strategy and the national strategic development plan 2006-2010, to work to achieve sustainable development and poverty reduction. The carrying out of those national blueprints has yielded strong economic growth that has averaged more than 11 per cent over the past three years.

Therefore, at the Annual Ministerial Review of the Economic and Social Council, held in Geneva in July of this year, Cambodia was invited, together with five other countries, to make a national presentation on actual progress made in achieving our MDGs.

Concerning our Organization, the United Nations, we are more than ever convinced of the urgent need for comprehensive reform — and not just of the Security Council — because we need to mobilize our collective efforts and wisdom to address, in a responsive and comprehensive way, the problems we are facing in the twenty-first century.

Mr. Al Bayati (Iraq), Vice-President, took the Chair.

There is no doubt that the status quo does not correspond with the challenges confronting the world today. Cambodia is of the view that United Nations

reform must be comprehensive. Therefore, instead of focusing primarily on reform of the Security Council, perhaps we can start with reform that can garner a consensus. For example, we could begin by considering how to make the Economic and Social Council more effective and more relevant so that it can deal with the problems of development in the context of the MDGs. Then, of course, we also need to empower the General Assembly so that it can play a prominent role in addressing today's global problems as a democratic, deliberative, policymaking and representative organ of the United Nations. Next, having built up momentum and consensus by reforming both the Economic and Social Council and the Assembly, we could move on to reform of the Security Council to ensure that it reflects today's realities, with equitable representation for developed and developing countries.

To conclude, I would like to say that our world is currently facing serious threats of great proportion and severe regional crises. At the same time, development and poverty remain high on the agendas of countries in many parts of the world. Therefore, the United Nations must play a more leading role if it is to respond effectively to those challenges.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Thongloun Sisoulith, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Lao People's Democratic Republic.

Mr. Sisoulith (Lao People's Democratic Republic): At the outset, let me express, on behalf of the Lao delegation, my cordial salutations and congratulations to Mr. Srgjan Kerim on his election as President of the General Assembly at its sixty-second session. I should also like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, for his strong commitment to the reform process in pursuit of a strong, fully mobile and multifunctional United Nations. His great efforts and dedication to the cause of enhancing peace and security and promoting global socio-economic development and justice also deserve our praise.

The issue of development is becoming increasingly prominent. Today, our world remains far from secure. Parts of our planet are beset by violence, natural disasters and pandemics. All of humankind continues to live under the threat of nuclear weapons and in fear of terror and the spread of weapons of mass destruction. That fear will become much greater if those weapons fall into the wrong hands. Furthermore, the use or threat of use of force to resolve international problems, together with violations of the sovereignty of Member States, persists. That hinders progress in the enhancement of international peace and security and development cooperation among Member States.

Despite the fact that globalization offers new opportunities for development, developing countries — in particular least developed, landlocked and small island developing States — have not reaped its benefits, as they ought to be able to do. That is due primarily to a lack of basic infrastructure, as well as a lack of access to markets, modern technology, financing and investment. In order to guarantee greater benefits for the most vulnerable countries, the international community must intensify its concerted efforts to assist them in fully and effectively implementing its respective programmes of action, as called for in the 2005 World Summit Outcome (resolution 60/1). This should include strengthened international partnerships, increased official development assistance, greater market access and special and preferential tariffs for their exports.

Further measures should be taken to ensure debt sustainability, technology transfer and the promotion of equitable structures of international trade and finance in favour of those vulnerable countries. In addition, the international community should give priority to the provision of both financial assistance, in the form of grant aid or soft loans to those countries, and technical assistance.

The world community is facing challenges caused by human activity, such as climate change, which affects all nations, rich and poor. Yet the Member States who suffer most from this catastrophe are the least developed countries and small island developing States, due to their lack of resources and capacity for adaptation. In that context, I believe that the outcome of the High-level Event on Climate Change will significantly contribute to successful negotiations on a comprehensive agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change to deal with the matter.

I hereby affirm that efforts to address climate change should not compromise attainment of the development objectives of developing countries. Addressing the issue should fully cover the three

pillars of sustainable development. The efforts should be based on the principle of common but differentiated responsibility between the developed and developing countries. In order to enable the developing countries, particularly the two most vulnerable groups among them, to achieve sustainable development and address climate change, the developed countries should provide them with the necessary financing for adaptation, mitigation and the transfer of appropriate technology.

For the United Nations to meet the daunting challenges that lie ahead, it should transform itself into a strong, efficient and effective organization. To that end, the United Nations reform process should be conducted in a comprehensive, inclusive, transparent and balanced manner. A strong and effective United Nations would better perform its mandate to maintain international peace and security through the peaceful settlement of disputes and the promotion of international cooperation for development. However, the United Nations reform process would not be complete without the Security Council being restructured into a more legitimate, representative, democratic and effective organ.

Like other Member States, the Lao People's Democratic Republic welcomes the progress achieved in the implementation of the outcome of the Six-Party Talks on the nuclear issue in the Korean Peninsula. We believe that through committed efforts by all concerned parties, the results of the talks will be fully translated into action, thus contributing to the eventual denuclearization of the region.

The Lao People's Democratic Republic reaffirms its continued support for the General Assembly resolutions urging an end to the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed on Cuba. Contrary to international law and the United Nations Charter, those coercive measures have caused great difficulties and losses to the people of Cuba.

The prolonged and persistent violence in the Middle East remains a cause of concern to the world community. As a result, the Palestinian, Lebanese and Iraqi peoples have suffered great losses in human life and property. The Lao People's Democratic Republic reaffirms its support for the Palestinian people in their struggle for the right to self-determination, including the right to establish a sovereign and independent State of Palestine, living side by side in peace with Israel and other countries in the region.

The Lao People's Democratic Republic is enjoying unwavering peace, political and social stability and economic growth. This year is the second year of the continued implementation of the country's sixth Five-Year Socio-Economic Development Plan, for 2006 to 2010. As a result, significant achievements have been recorded. The poverty rate declined from 48 per cent in 1990 to 28 per cent in 2005. Opium cultivation was completely eradicated in 2006. The practice of shifting cultivation declined six times from 2001 to 2005. Tourism, particularly cultural and ecotourism, has been broadly promoted and expanded, thus attracting more and more tourists to the country. The Lao Government continues to pursue a development policy that is aimed at promotion of sustainable development, sustained use and conservation of natural resources, exploitation of clean energy and protection of the environment and the ecosystem.

In November 2006, in cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme, the Lao Government held the ninth Round-Table Meeting, which provided a consultative forum for the development partners and various Lao Government agencies to engage in a constructive and frank dialogue on development assistance. The meeting adopted the Vientiane Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, which reflects the commitments of the Lao Government and its development partners to improve the coordination and effectiveness of official development assistance.

In pursuance of its foreign policy of peace, friendship and cooperation with all countries in the world, the Lao People's Democratic Republic has had diplomatic relations with 125 countries and has become a member of various regional and international organizations, with a view to integrating itself into the regional and international economic system. One of the significant events for the Lao People's Democratic Republic this year is the convening of the twenty-third ministerial meeting of the International Organization of la Francophonie on 20 and 21 November 2007 in Vientiane. As the host country, the Lao Government would like to encourage all member States to participate and actively contribute to the success of that meeting.

To conclude, the Lao People's Democratic Republic reaffirms its unswerving commitment to continue cooperating with the international community in pursuit of a peaceful, equitable and prosperous

world, free of fear and want, in order to ensure the well-being of all peoples on the basis of respect for the principles of the United Nations Charter and international law, as well as the recognition of diversity and respect for the social, cultural and historic reality of each country. To that end, greater efforts and sacrifices are definitely required from us all. Yet I am sure that together we will be able to make it happen.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Tavau Teii, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Natural Resources of Tuvalu.

Mr. Teii (Tuvalu): Today has a very special meaning for us: twenty-nine years ago, under the blessings of this body, Tuvalu was granted its independence. I am honoured, therefore, to speak on behalf of the people and Government of Tuvalu and to convey to this session of the United Nations General Assembly our warmest greetings.

At the outset, Tuvalu wishes to associate itself with previous speakers in congratulating Mr. Kerim in his election as President of the General Assembly at its sixty-second session. We also wish to take this opportunity to welcome and congratulate the Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, on his appointment as head of the United Nations.

As we celebrate our twenty-ninth anniversary of independence, let me convey our most sincere thanks and gratitude to the international community, especially to our traditional development partners, close friends and international and regional organizations for their support and cooperation over the past years. We are confident that such gestures of understanding, friendship and cooperation will continue in the years ahead. Our endeavours to achieve excellence have been guided by the United Nations principles of good governance, respect for the rule of law and for human rights, democracy and self-determination. Our future survival as a nation is founded on these basic ideals of the United Nations.

Tuvalu welcomes the key priority issues of climate change, financing for development, achieving the Millennium Development Goals, countering terrorism, and the United Nations reform agenda, which the President has clearly identified and highlighted in his opening address at the sixty-second session. We would like, however, to focus on five main issues: the United Nations reforms, the United Nations presence in Pacific small island developing States, the question of Taiwan's membership in the United Nations and its agencies, criteria for least developed countries graduation, and responding to climate change.

On the United Nations reforms, we acknowledge with sincerity the tremendous efforts that the Organization has made in fulfilling its purpose, based on its noble pillars of development: peace and security and human rights, as enshrined under its Charter. Through such efforts, the United Nations has reached out to many countries of the world in providing the required services for those who need them most. However, these efforts always encounter many challenges that can be resolved only if the United Nations membership and all its subsidiary bodies commit to work together in harmony and with respect for each other.

The need for the United Nations to ensure efficiency, effectiveness and transparency in carrying out its mandates and all its related programmes cannot be overemphasized. In this connection, Tuvalu welcomes and supports the ongoing work on United Nations reform. In particular, Tuvalu supports the Secretary-General's report in response to the recommendations of the High-level Panel on United Nations System-wide Coherence and agrees that the United Nations system must be more results-oriented, efficient and accountable.

Tuvalu fully supports the ongoing reform work of the United Nations that promotes country-driven programmes. However, we are very disappointed with the unjustifiably slow progress in establishing the United Nations presence in the remaining Pacific small island developing States that do not have United Nations offices. As a full Member of the United Nations, we feel that Tuvalu and other small island developing States from the Pacific each deserve to have a United Nations office established in-country, which will be instrumental in the coordination and implementation of United Nations projects and programmes on the ground. Our isolation and geographical fragmentation in itself is justification for establishing a joint United Nations office in Tuvalu. We appeal to the United Nations for the earliest implementation of this long overdue commitment.

Tuvalu highly commends the momentum of the work on the reform of the Security Council, especially the excellent work done by the Open-ended Working

Group on the Question of Equitable Representation on and Increase in the Membership of the Security Council and Other Matters Related to the Security Council. Tuvalu warmly welcomes the next step of submitting the issue for further intergovernmental negotiations as a way forward. Tuvalu further supports the draft resolution tabled by India for the same purpose in addressing this very important task.

However, we are very disturbed with the continuance of finger-pointing and undiplomatic language being directed at small island developing States for their contributions to the Security Council reform process. As a small peace-loving nation and a full Member of the United Nations, Tuvalu has the sovereign right to support any issue that will benefit the achievement of the United Nations goals. We strongly believe that open dialogue and working together in mutual understanding under the framework of the United Nations is the only way to reach our shared destiny in diversity and to respect one another.

Tuvalu firmly believes that the paramount mission of the United Nations must remain the maintenance of peace and security while ensuring the universal participation of all nations of the world, as clearly articulated in the Preamble to the United Nations Charter.

However, the United Nations cannot be said to be universal nor can global peace and security be assured until the issue of Taiwan's membership and participation in the United Nations is properly resolved. It is disappointing to note that this body does not even want to at least put Taiwan's membership application on its agenda for proper consideration.

Let me reaffirm Tuvalu's strong support for Taiwan's membership application to the United Nations. We feel that this issue is long overdue and needs to be considered more seriously and purely on its own merits.

Taiwan has shown international responsibility and has helped many countries in the world — including my own country, Tuvalu — with development assistance. It is our strong opinion that Taiwan is a country with a clearly defined territory and an established democratic system of government and is a responsible international player in world trade, development and diplomatic relations. The rights and self-determination of the Taiwanese people to join the United Nations should be urgently addressed. Taiwan has all of the capabilities needed to fulfil its obligations as a peace-loving State and become a full Member of the United Nations as required under the Charter of the United Nations.

Despite all this, it is sad to note that the United Nations has continued to turn a blind eye to the wishes and needs of the people of Taiwan, who simply want to be part of the international family and participate actively in the attainment of the noble pillars of development, security and human rights. More sadly, the action taken by the Secretary-General of the United Nations in not complying with the requirements of the Charter of the United Nations and the rules of procedure of the Security Council is disappointing. Tuvalu further appeals for the proper and urgent consideration of Taiwan's membership application to the United Nations.

The issue of graduating from the least developed countries (LDC) category has caused great anxiety for Tuvalu. As recognized in the Mauritius strategy for small island developing States, it is most alarming that all the potential candidates for graduation from the LDC list are Pacific small island developing States, despite our special disadvantages and environmental vulnerabilities. We appeal to this Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and our development partners to carefully reconsider the criteria for LDC graduation and their application, taking into account the special disadvantages of small island developing States.

The President's leadership in choosing "Responding to Climate Change" as the theme of this session is highly commendable. Likewise, Tuvalu applauds the leadership of the Secretary-General on climate change. We are pleased that world leaders at the High-level Event on Climate Change have agreed on the urgency of addressing climate change in a comprehensive way. We believe we are now ready to make a historic agreement in Bali to start negotiations on a new climate change agreement.

As the Prime Minister of Tuvalu, Mr. Apisai Ielemia, clearly stated in the June issue of the United Nations Chronicle magazine, "If there is one issue that strikes at the heart of my nation, Tuvalu, it is climate change." Climate change is undoubtedly an issue of extreme importance to a small, atoll nation like Tuvalu. The recent report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change highlights the extreme vulnerability of

island countries like Tuvalu to the impacts of climate change and the urgent necessity for global action to address this vulnerability. In this context the coming session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Bali will be very important.

In our view, the Conference in Bali should have the following components: First, it should reconfirm the important role of the Kyoto Protocol and encourage parties to the Protocol to pledge new and substantial emissions reductions and encourage others to become a party to it.

Secondly, we should agree to amend the Kyoto Protocol so that we open the door for newly industrialized countries, countries with economies in transition and any other interested countries, including developing countries, to take on commitments to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions.

Thirdly, we must commit to a new global framework on adaptation to the impacts of climate change. For highly vulnerable countries like Tuvalu this is an essential step in the process.

Lastly, we must agree on a new negotiation process under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change that will establish a new legal agreement to allow developing countries to make voluntary commitments to reduce their emissions. Under this agreement we envisage that developing countries will be able to make voluntary commitments to reduce emissions from the energy, transport and forestry sectors. These commitments would be linked to appropriate incentive mechanisms.

In the context of reducing emissions from deforestation we believe that any agreed measures must bring about real reductions in global emissions. Actions to reduce emissions from deforestation should not undermine or devalue efforts to reduce emissions from other sectors. Furthermore, these actions should not infringe upon the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities. The causes of deforestation are complex, particularly as there are serious governance issues to resolve. Let us make sure to get a durable solution to this issue that will achieve a lasting climate change outcome.

There are a number of elements that we think are essential in a new global framework on adaptation. We elaborated some of these during the High-Level Event on Climate Change. Let me highlight two: First, we must establish a whole new source of funding for adaptation and a new approach on how adaptation funding is managed. A potential new source of funding for adaptation could come from a tax levied on international aviation and maritime transport. Secondly, we must establish a global insurance facility to help assist vulnerable countries recover from the impacts of climate change.

We must seize the opportunity at Bali. We must set ourselves a short timeframe to create a new legally binding agreement on climate change. This should not undermine the Kyoto Protocol but should build on its strengths. Those countries that have turned their backs on the Kyoto Protocol must now take part in the global effort and commit to reducing their emissions within a tight timeframe. Once this is done, then we will see the rest of the world move forward, for it is crucial that all countries must make an effort to reduce their emissions. We must not waste the opportunity at Bali.

In conclusion, my Government encourages all countries to support the reform agenda for the United Nations including the serious consideration of self-determination and the universal participation of all nations. We strongly encourage all Governments to use the next climate change Conference of the Parties in Bali to be a starting point for new negotiations on climate change. The future of Tuvalu and lives of many others like us is at stake.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Andrei Stratan, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister for Foreign Affairs and European Integration of the Republic of Moldova.

Mr. Stratan (Moldova): I would like, first of all, to join the speakers who have already addressed this Assembly in congratulating Mr. Kerim on his election as President of the General Assembly at its sixty-second session.

It also gives me great pleasure to welcome the appointment of Mr. Ban Ki-moon as Secretary-General and to acknowledge the distinct manner in which he has started his activities, as well as his tireless efforts to breathe a new dynamism into the United Nations with the purpose of optimizing its functioning.

The present session is especially meaningful for the Republic of Moldova, marking the fifteenth anniversary of its having joined the United Nations

family. As a State Member of the United Nations, the Republic of Moldova has demonstrated faithfulness to the principles and purposes of the United Nations Charter by totally supporting the objectives of the Organization and sharing its responsibilities.

The globalization process is occurring everywhere and is of concern to all of us. As members know, those issues are addressed in the Millennium Declaration (resolution 55/2). In our opinion, the present level of aid is not sufficient; the identification of innovative sources of financing and an increase in the effectiveness of existing aid are imperative. In that vein, we hope that the recommendations in the areas of development contained in the report of the Secretary-General's High-level Panel on United Nations System-wide Coherence (A/61/583) will help us overcome the fragmentation of the United Nations so that the system can deliver as one, in partnership with all Member States.

The high-level event organized under the auspices of the Secretary-General that preceded the general debates drew attention to climate change, whose fatal effects have been experienced all over the world. We know about that very well as, this summer, our country suffered the worst drought in 60 years. We highly appreciate the United Nations institutions, first and foremost the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the World Food Programme, and all Member States which immediately answered our request for help. We continue to count on such aid in mitigating the consequences of the drought.

Under these circumstances, we favour the adoption of a new international agreement in this area, and we hope that the next session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change will be able to negotiate new arrangements for moving beyond the Kyoto Protocol.

Terrorism remains a major threat to the internal security of countries and to international security. In that regard, the Republic of Moldova wholeheartedly supports United Nations efforts in fighting terrorism. One example of this is our joining the International Convention for the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism. Internally, the Government has undertaken a series of concrete actions towards fighting terrorism by adopting its national strategy for preventing and fighting money-laundering and terrorism financing, as well as by implementing relevant resolutions of the Security Council.

We see in the present session of the General Assembly an opportunity to finalize the draft of a comprehensive convention on international terrorism aimed at reaching an international consensus on a normative framework in that area. Heightened attention must be given to the fight against terrorism nourished by separatist tendencies that affect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States. I wish to assure members that our delegation will participate actively in coordinating the negotiating process in the Sixth Committee of the General Assembly.

The United Nations has represented for decades the proper forum for tackling varied problems related to disarmament and non-proliferation. The Republic of Moldova welcomes the new approach to controlling small arms and light weapons and in that context we are in favour of a new agreement in the area of arms sales. We support the international community's efforts aimed at establishing an efficient security system and arms control system and remain a faithful supporter of implementing the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE).

I wish to reiterate on this occasion the position of the Republic of Moldova that the withdrawal of the Russian troops that remain on Moldovan territory against our will, in conformity with the obligations assumed by the Russian Federation in 1999 in Istanbul, would create the necessary conditions for ratifying and applying the adapted CFE Treaty.

The Transdniestrian conflict remains a continuous obstacle to promoting reforms and ensuring the social and economic development of our country. A year ago, speaking in the Assembly, we addressed in great detail the problems related to the conflict and expressed hope for a final sustainable solution. Today, I have to state regretfully that the negotiations process — suspended since April 2006 because of the rigid and non-constructive position of separatist leaders supported from outside Moldova — could not be restarted, in spite of our constant efforts. That serves as a screen for promoting some political and mafia interests foreign to the people of the region. Continuous violations of fundamental human rights in the Transdniestrian region and the inefficiency of the existing peacekeeping mechanism make imperative the need to transform that mechanism into a multinational civil mission with an international mandate.

In the context of United Nations consolidation, the Republic of Moldova supports the adoption of decisions necessary for the revitalization of the General Assembly, reform of the Security Council and the strengthening of the Economic and Social Council. In that respect, we consider that the Security Council needs to be extended in both permanent and non-permanent categories, as a result of which the Eastern European Group would be offered an additional non-permanent seat.

We welcome the adoption of resolution 61/16, on the strengthening of the Economic and Social Council, the major body for coordinating the economic and social activities of the United Nations. The Republic of Moldova presented its candidature for the current year's elections to the Economic and Social Council, and I take this opportunity to thank all the Member States that granted us their trust.

The Republic of Moldova has constantly supported the maintenance and consolidation of the Organization's role in resolving crisis and conflict situations, aiding in post-conflict construction and providing humanitarian assistance to affected zones in various parts of the world, especially to the zones affected by conflicts, including the GUAM region. In that respect, we welcome the decision of the General Assembly to maintain in the agenda of the current session item 16, entitled "Protracted conflicts in the GUAM area and their implications for international peace, security and development", and the increased attention it is paying to the issue.

I would like in conclusion to reaffirm the will of the State I represent to cooperate in and actively contribute to the common efforts of Member States to strengthen the United Nations as the Organization that holds the key role in peacekeeping, security and sustainable development.

The Acting President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now call on His Excellency Minister Sayyid Badr Bin Hamad AlBusaidi, Secretary General of the Foreign Ministry of the Sultanate of Oman.

Mr. AlBusaidi (Oman) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, it gives me pleasure to extend to the President and his friendly country, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, my country's warmest congratulations on Mr. Kerim's assumption of the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-second session. We are confident that his vast diplomatic experience will help us to achieve desired objectives and will steer the Assembly to a successful conclusion. Let me also pay tribute to his predecessor, Sheikha Haya Al-Khalifa, from the sisterly Kingdom of Bahrain, for the optimal manner in which she so ably and wisely conducted the work of the General Assembly at its sixty-first session.

I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate Mr. Ban Ki-moon on his appointment as Secretary-General of the United Nations. We are confident that he will render valuable services to this Organization, with his vast experience in both political and diplomatic fields. I assure him of my delegation's readiness to offer all the necessary assistance to help him discharge his responsibilities. We wish him every success. I would like also to commend Mr. Kofi Annan for all the efforts he made to promote the work of this Organization during his tenure as Secretary-General.

The annual session of the General Assembly provides us with the opportunity to address various regional and international issues and to express our concerns and interests. I would like to point out here that the efforts exerted by the United Nations have helped us to understand the process of addressing many international problems, including the important question of the Middle East.

Despite the fact that efforts made to address the situations in Palestine, Iraq, Darfur, Somalia and other areas have so far failed to provide conclusive solutions, they are nevertheless positive indications demonstrating the willingness and determination of the international community to shoulder its responsibilities in order to end the Arab-Israeli conflict on the basis of establishing a Palestinian State living in peace side by side with the State of Israel.

The withdrawal of Israel from the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, the establishment of the State of Palestine and the withdrawal of Israel from the Syrian Golan Heights and Lebanese Shaba'a farms will promote security and stability in the Middle East region. This will encourage the development of cooperation among the countries and peoples of the region. We sense that there are positive trends and new convictions among Israeli political leaders, and in Israeli society at large, on the need to reach a peaceful solution based on the relevant resolutions of the United Nations, in order to put an end to decades of conflict in the Middle East region.

It is necessary to point out here that Arab States have on many occasions stressed their conviction that

the achievement of a just and equitable peace with Israel depends on the withdrawal of Israel to the borders of 1967. Establishing such a peace is the Arab States' strategic choice.

We call upon the international community, especially the major Powers, to promote this positive conviction within Israel and the Arab States in the interest of achieving peace.

Iraqi blood continues to be spilled. We believe that the extension of the new responsibilities of the United Nations in Iraq, in accordance with Security Council resolution 1770 (2007), is a positive step that commands our full support. In this respect, we urge our brothers in Iraq, especially the Iraqi Government, to move from a stage of discord to a stage of problem-solving in the national interest of Iraq.

We are optimistic about the sincere efforts exerted by the Sudanese Government and the African Union to reach a political settlement among the various Sudanese parties in Darfur. We support the tripartite agreement signed by that Government, the United Nations and the African Union, on providing support to African forces and on deploying more troops in Darfur to restore security and achieve success in the negotiations between the Sudanese Government and the opposition groups in Darfur.

Somalia is still suffering the consequences of a civil war that has claimed the lives of thousands of people and displaced hundreds of thousands more. We believe that accord among the different Somali factions is the only way out. We also believe that the international community has a major responsibility to help Somalia restore its unity and security. To guarantee the effectiveness of the assistance given by the international community, we urge all tribes and factions in Somalia to be decisive and to help those who are trying to help them.

We have always welcomed the continued cooperation between the friendly Islamic Republic of Iran and the International Atomic and Energy Agency (IAEA). There are hopes and opportunities that augur well for a peaceful solution guaranteeing the right of Iran to benefit from peaceful nuclear technology and assuages the concerns of the international community.

We as human beings are all partners on this planet and we have to work together to build it and develop and preserve its resources. Therefore, it is important for the international community to observe the extraordinary weather conditions such as hurricanes, floods and the erosion and loss of arable land that are taking place in different continents. These phenomena have inflicted human and economic losses, displaced hundreds of thousands of people from their homes and have damaged the necessary sources of health and livelihood, in addition to other essential services.

In this context, we commend the vital role played by the United Nations and recognize its efforts in organizing the High-level Event on Climate Change that was held on 24 September. We also urge the international community to develop specific measures and identify steps and solutions to face these challenges.

More than ever before, the international community is called upon to commission environmental and scientific studies to face the dangers posed by such phenomena, in order to maintain ecological balance and diversity, which both are necessary if life is to continue on this planet. Hence, we must harness the new technological and electronic developments in order to combat pollution and preserve the environment and biological diversity. In that regard, we welcome and are pleased to be among the many States that have endorsed the special initiative on the Millennium Development Goals with regard to the call for action that was adopted recently.

We also welcome the convening of the high-level dialogue on cooperation between religions and cultures, scheduled to be held during this session in October. We hope that the meeting will succeed in adopting a futuristic view that focuses on the positive aspects, based on understanding between religions and cultures. Such understanding must be based on mutual respect for all religious beliefs and cultures.

In closing, we wish this session every success and we hope that we may be able to leave it with a vision that defines the road for the future in the service of mankind with renewed commitments among Member States to United Nations resolutions and to respect for the provisions of the Charter.

The Acting President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Walid Al-Moualem, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Al-Moualem (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to congratulate Mr. Srgjan Kerim on his election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-second session and to wish him every success in his important task. Allow me also to salute his predecessor, Sheikha Haya Rashed Al-Khalifa of sisterly Bahrain and to express our appreciation of the efforts she deployed to bring the work of that session to a successful conclusion.

I also wish to express to the new Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, our best wishes for success in his noble mission, namely, that of guiding our international Organization towards the realization of the purposes and principles of its Charter.

The Middle East region has been an arena of daunting challenges and heightened tensions owing to the Israeli occupation, since 1967, of Arab territories and to the denial of the legitimate national rights of the Palestinian people. Although this is not a new development, recent challenges and tensions have been escalating and, as such, they not only threaten security and stability throughout the region, but also international peace and security. The hopes of the peoples of the region of achieving a just and comprehensive peace and living in a secure and stable environment have faded, if they have not totally died. Moreover, the current situation in Iraq and the attendant anger and apprehensions it has generated have turned the region into an explosive hotbed of tensions and a theatre of confrontations, instead of allowing it to prosper, pursue its development goals and achieve progress.

May I, therefore, ask what have we accomplished over the past year or during the previous session of the General Assembly in terms of addressing the root causes of tensions plaguing the Middle East region? That situation does not serve the interests of any of the parties, inside or outside the region. The prevailing trends have not changed: Israeli occupation of Arab lands continues, so does the denial of the legitimate rights of Palestinians. One can even say that the support, financing and arming of those policies have continued unabated and have even surpassed previous records. The recently reported figures on the increased United States arming of Israel speak for themselves.

The latest act of aggression against Syria on 6 September 2007 is proof of Israel's desire to escalate tensions. We reiterate that the failure of the international community, including the Security Council, to condemn that act of aggression will encourage Israel to persist in that hostile pursuit, and will lead to the exacerbation of tensions in the region. Some sources in the United States have spread rumours and fabricated news in order to justify that act of aggression. By distorting the facts they have become Israel's accomplices in that act.

Addressing and pursuing peace in the Middle East require first and foremost evincing the will to make peace on the basis of law and justice. Regrettably, that will does not factor into the priorities of some of the policies pursued nowadays. The contemplated substance, approach and objectives of an international gathering that seeks to find a comprehensive solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict remain vague. Furthermore, the proposed gathering fails to identify the purpose, basis, terms of reference and time frame of the process.

Syria has repeatedly stressed and stresses again today that peace is its strategic choice. President Bashar Al-Assad highlighted that fact in the statement he made before the People's Assembly on 17 July 2007. He stated that Syria is ready for a just and comprehensive peace built on resolutions of international legitimacy, which he deemed to be the prelude to the realization of peace and security in the region. The statement confirms that Syria has the will to make a genuine peace that would recover the rights and return the land to its rightful owners and that would guarantee peace for all. We have repeatedly called for a resumption of the peace process on the basis of the Madrid terms of reference and the principle of land for peace. Let me ask here: does the Israeli Government or the current American administration still have that will, the will to make genuine peace? Regrettably, actions and realities on the ground suggest otherwise.

The current situation in Iraq presages great dangers for Iraq and the region. Addressing that situation requires effective cooperation among all parties inside Iraq, in the region and the world at large. The absence of a genuine political vision for a solution and the exclusive reliance on a military solution further aggravate the situation. We have always stressed the need to preserve the unity of the Iraqi people and the Iraqi land, the non-interference in its internal affairs, the preservation of its sovereignty and independence, its Arab and Islamic identity and the rejection of any

claims to divide it. We believe that the solution in Iraq must begin with national reconciliation based on the principle of respect for the will of all segments of the Iraqi people to determine their political future or to lay the foundation for a new Iraq that is built on equal citizenship. We therefore stress the need for the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Iraq, in agreement with the Iraqi Government, because that measure will contribute to curbing the violence. We have repeatedly stressed our condemnation of all terrorist acts committed in Iraq that claim the lives of innocent civilians. Occasional allegations that combatants are infiltrating into Iraq through the Syrian-Iraqi border cannot be farther from the truth. They fail to acknowledge the strict measures that Syria has put in place to control those borders. We believe that the purpose of those unfounded accusations is to assign to others the responsibility for the failure of the occupying Power to achieve security and stability in Iraq.

The deteriorating security situation in Iraq has prompted many Iraqis to flee their country. There are over 1.6 million Iraqi refugees in Syria today. In addition to the security and social repercussions associated with their presence, Syria is bearing an enormous financial burden to satisfy their economic needs and to provide them with services. It is regrettable that the international community has failed to discharge its responsibility to assist Iraqi refugees until it becomes safe for them to return to their homes and country. The occupying Power spends hundreds of billions of dollars on military operations inside Iraq, but fails to allocate any resources to assist Iraqis who have been forced out of Iraq as a result of the occupation and its repercussions.

Official visits exchanged between fraternal Iraq and Syria have opened broad horizons for mutual cooperation and have identified the main areas of cooperation at all levels. Syria, for its part, plans to implement all the measures agreed to during those visits.

The critical and sensitive situation in brotherly Lebanon requires that the Lebanese act together in order to emerge from the current state of affairs and arrive at solutions that will serve the interest of Lebanon and its future. Syria has consistently supported all initiatives aimed at activating Lebanese dialogue within the country with a view to arriving at a consensus. We believe that the run-up to the coming presidential elections constitutes a good basis for consensus-building among the Lebanese to elect a president in accordance with constitutional rules, free from foreign intervention and in a manner that would safeguard Lebanon's interests and its relations with Arab countries.

Syria reaffirms its position calling for the elimination of all weapons of mass destruction from the Middle East region. Allow me to recall that in 2003 Syria tabled a draft resolution before the Security Council on behalf of the Arab Group, and we are still looking forward to its adoption.

I would like to affirm that Syria associates itself with the declared positions of other developing countries, which stress the freedom and the right of all countries to acquire nuclear technologies to use them for peaceful purposes. We believe that it is necessary to compel Israel, the sole party in the region that possesses nuclear weapons, to submit its facilities to the safeguards regime of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and to adhere to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement.

Like many others, I wonder whether the world has become safer many years after the beginning of the war on terrorism. The answer is common knowledge. Terrorism has spread to areas that have never known that phenomenon before. Syria believes that fighting terrorism by force alone is useless. We must address the root causes of terrorism and firmly distinguish between combating terrorism and the legitimate right of people to resist foreign occupation. We call on all States to cooperate in the fight against terrorism. At the same time, we warn against using terrorism as a pretext to compromise peoples' rights and to instil hatred among religions and civilizations instead of promoting intercultural and interreligious dialogues in the interest of humanity at large.

Earlier on in the debate we listened to calls advocating interference in the internal affairs of States under the pretext of defending human rights and promoting democracy. Syria questions the discrepancy between words and actions in Palestine, Iraq, Lebanon and other parts of the world. The inhumane practices we learned of in Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib and the condoning of Israeli aggression against Lebanon last year and other Israeli practices in Palestine and the Golan constitute grave violations of human rights. That

prompts us to question in turn, and rightly so: which human rights are they advocating?

More than ever before our world needs a reaffirmation of our commitment to the principles and purposes of the United Nations, in order to avoid applying double standards and to free the Organization from those few who try to control its decisions and dictate their policies to its organs. The conflicts and crises with which our world is plagued today must prompt us to seek solutions based on enhanced intercultural and interreligious dialogues, and to persevere in our pursuit of the political solutions to current international problems in a manner that would preserve international peace and security.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Nyamaa Enkhbold, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Mongolia.

Mr. Enkhbold (Mongolia): We are at the middle of the road, halfway towards the 2015 deadline for achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Eight years are left — is that much? Are we keeping the pace? Measured against the history of the human race it is but a sand particle in an hourglass. But measured against the hopes and expectations of millions of people living in abject poverty with no access to clean water, for children with little prospect of gaining an education and reaching their full potential in life, for women dying in childbirth, for infants who will never learn how to walk or talk or read and write, who are taken away by preventable diseases — that surely amounts to much more than a sand particle.

By 2015 our peoples will judge whether the pledges and commitments made by their leaders and the international community as a whole were genuine. They shall ascertain whether the conferences and illustrious gatherings of the world leaders stand for actual deeds or whether they simply equal empty words and hollow promises. The eight years towards 2015 are thus a litmus test of our credibility. To pass the test or not is, therefore, upon us. We must deliver what we pledged. We must achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and other internationally agreed development goals. We must exert our best efforts individually as nations and we must exert them collectively as the international community.

In order to do this, we must now look back at our individual progress so far. We must take stock of what has already been achieved and what is yet to be done to achieve the Goals on time. My country, Mongolia, is intimately monitoring its own progress on the path towards achieving the MDGs. The second national report on MDG implementation in Mongolia has only recently been considered by the national Government.

Implementation of the MDGs is about meeting the basic needs of the people and securing their social and personal welfare, and my Government is very serious about delivering them for our people. Unfortunately, despite the considerable efforts made, success is still far from assured on a number of goals and, first and foremost, on the goal to halve poverty.

On a global scale, the MDG progress report of 2007 revealed the same mixed picture. The report made a strong case for concerted additional action to be taken immediately and sustained until 2015 if the world is to attain the MDGs. It argued that the lack of any significant increase in official development assistance since 2004 makes it impossible, even for well-governed countries, to meet the MDGs.

Against that backdrop, I lend my full backing and support to the proposal of the President of the General Assembly to have an MDG leaders' meeting here at the United Nations. Such a meeting must, in our view, not only serve as a midterm review mechanism, but also coin concrete proposals and recommendations on the way forward.

We are fully aware of our primary responsibility for our own development, yet there are factors well beyond our control that impede progress, and climate change figures prominently among them. Climate change is definitely no longer a subject of pure scientific and academic discourse. Nations large and small, coastal and landlocked alike, are feeling its effects on their economies and the livelihoods of their peoples. The recent report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change indicated that poor countries will be the hardest hit by climate change, in spite of the fact that they contribute the least to the phenomenon. Is that fair?

The contribution of my country to global warming is negligible at best, yet Mongolia is severely affected by the negative consequences of climate change. To give but a few examples, over the past 60 years the average temperature in Mongolia has risen by almost 2°C, compared to a rise in the global mean temperature of about 1°C over the last century. Some 80 per cent of the land surface has been degraded,

mostly by wind erosion combined with human activities, including mining and overgrazing by livestock. Desertification is rampant. Pastures that support the semi-nomadic lifestyle of Mongols have decreased and become more fragile. Over the past 40 years, soil fertility has decreased by a factor of two to three. The country has been subject to the ever-more frequent occurrence of natural disasters, such as drought and *dzud* — cold winters with heavy snowfalls — in recent years, which have had a severe impact on the pastoral economy of the country.

Fair or not, no country can stand aside or afford inaction in the face of such truly global challenges like climate change. We all must carry our share of the common endeavour, yet it is only natural that those who contribute the most to global warming bear the bulk of the burden. Hence, the industrialized countries should fulfil their commitments to taking the lead in reducing their greenhouse gas emissions and to providing financial resources and transferring clean technologies to developing countries.

The comprehensive implementation of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Kyoto Protocol remains a priority even as the international community embarks on the road towards shaping the post-Kyoto framework. The post-Kyoto framework should be flexible and diverse, taking into consideration circumstances in each country. It must include all the major emitters and achieve compatibility between environmental protection and economic growth by utilizing advances in technologies to the greatest extent possible.

The United Nations Climate Change Conference to be held in Bali in December will have a crucial role in shaping such a future framework. We must seize the opportunity and fully utilize the current session of the General Assembly to build the groundwork for the Bali Conference.

Regional and subregional mechanisms should also be mobilized as complementary and supplementary instruments to global efforts. Mongolia, a North-East Asian country, attaches particular importance to developing environmental cooperation mechanisms in the subregion, as dust and sand storms originating in the expanding Gobi desert have become a familiar phenomenon for inhabitants of Beijing, Seoul, Tokyo and beyond.

North-East Asia is one of the most dynamic and diverse regions of the world. It contains some of the world's major economic powerhouses, such as China, Japan, the Republic of Korea and the Russian Federation, along with the smaller and more vulnerable economies of Mongolia and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. The subregion is also home to a quarter of the world's population. The sheer size and diversity of the subregion mean that climate change manifestations are wide-ranging, yet intimately felt in each and every country.

Mongolia has therefore come up with an initiative to hold a North-East Asian summit on climate change in the nearest future. We hope that such a high-level event will achieve a breakthrough in regional cooperation on climate change and serve as a tangible contribution to global efforts.

Nationally, Mongolia has been making continuous efforts to address the challenges posed by climate change by appropriately improving its legal environment and actively implementing various programmes and projects. In 1996, a national action plan to combat desertification was adopted. In 1999, we established a national climate change committee entrusted with formulating national policy on adaptation to climate change and reduction of greenhouse gases, preparing reports on national greenhouse gas inventories, policies and measures. In 2000, the Government of Mongolia launched its national action programme on climate change aimed not only at meeting UNFCCC obligations, but also at setting priorities for action and integrating climate change concerns into other national and sectoral development plans and programmes.

Furthermore, our MDG-based national development strategy, the draft of which was recently submitted to Parliament for its consideration and approval, contains a separate chapter on environmental policy. It identifies the protection of nature and the environment, the reasonable use of natural resources, and climate change concerns among national priority goals. The draft strategy is expected to be approved by Parliament this autumn.

On a more practical side, in 2005 my Government launched a major programme on agroforestry development, entitled Green Belt, in an attempt to combat desertification, stop sand movement, and

reduce dust and sand storms. Upon its completion, a great green wall will extend for 2,500 kilometres from the East to the West of the country, shielding the steppes from the Gobi desert.

In the energy sector, which is mostly based on fossil fuels, particularly coal, the Government is making continued efforts to introduce an alternative or renewable source of energy. To that effect, the construction of hydro-power plants has started, along with the implementation of the 100,000 Solar Ger programme.

The landlocked geographical situation of my country is an additional hurdle for our development efforts and MDG implementation. Indeed, our lack of territorial access to the sea, remoteness from world markets, and subsequent high transportation costs and undue delays are major impediments to the trade of landlocked developing countries. Higher trade costs reduce a country's welfare and inhibit economic growth by making imports expensive and exports uncompetitive.

Hence, Mongolia, together with other like-minded countries, has endeavoured to raise the awareness of the international community of the need for support and assistance for land-locked developing countries and to promote the common position and interests of the group at both the United Nations and the World Trade Organization. Here, I wish to highlight the importance of the meeting of trade ministers of land-locked developing countries and the thematic meeting of land-locked developing countries and their transit neighbours on trade and trade facilitation issues, held last month in Ulaanbaatar, the capital city of Mongolia, for setting the priorities of the group in the context of the Doha Round of multilateral trade negotiations and in the lead-up to the midterm review of the Almaty Programme of Action.

Security concerns continue to affect global development. Despite our best efforts, the world around us is still not a safe place for many. Millions suffer on a daily basis from hunger, illness, insecurity and the threat of violence. Thousands and thousands perish in sectarian violence, terrorist attacks and internal conflicts, with thousands more having fled violence, thus augmenting the growing ranks of refugees and internally displaced persons. All this invariably takes a heavy toll on the development aspirations of the affected countries.

Many of us come from countries not ravaged by conflicts or from regions that lie thousands of miles from conflict zones, yet, in this age of globalization, none of us remains unaffected. Record-setting oil prices triggered by the situation in the Middle East have a profound impact on the world economy. Small, vulnerable and commodity-dependent economies, such as that of Mongolia, are hit hardest, along with other oil-importing developing countries. However, it is ordinary people in the Middle East who bear the brunt of the suffering. The international community must deliver a promise of peace and security to the peoples of Iraq, Israel, Palestine, Darfur and other conflict zones.

We must continue our global fight against terrorism, with the United Nations at the helm of that collective effort. The recent hostage crisis in Afghanistan came as a sobering reminder of the threat still posed by the Taliban. It proved once again that terrorists prey on those who cannot fight back. Thus, it is our solemn duty to offer protection to those who cannot defend themselves.

Mongolia, a country with internationally recognized nuclear-weapon-free status, is pleased with the progress achieved in the six-party talks on the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula, the latest round of which took place last week in Beijing. As its contribution to advancing the six-party talks, on 4 and 5 September Mongolia hosted a bilateral working group session on the normalization of relations between Japan and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea this year, and stands ready to continue such efforts in the future.

Mongolia is heartened at the news about the forthcoming inter-Korean summit meeting, to start tomorrow. We are hopeful that it will contribute to the cause of bringing about peace, security, and eventually a peaceful reunification of the Korean peninsula. In light of the promising political dynamics in the subregion, Mongolia is optimistic that its early call for a multilateral security cooperation mechanism in North-East Asia will gain support in the subregion and beyond.

With scores of countries having embarked in recent decades on a path towards establishing modern and functioning democratic societies built upon the principles of pluralism, respect for human rights, freedom of the press and democratic governance,

democracy has been firmly established as a truly universal value.

We in Mongolia believe that democracy is the best possible environment for sustained economic growth. Democracy and respect for human rights have been, in our view, inherently woven into the MDGs. Proceeding from that premise, in 2005 Mongolia was the first country to adopt a ninth MDG on strengthening human rights and fostering democratic governance.

We are proud of its successful democratic transition, with major gains in the political, economic, social and spiritual areas of our societal life. Yet, as a young democracy, my country is also intimately aware of the complex challenges faced by countries in transition. We believe in international cooperation and support for democratization efforts. In that regard, Mongolia applauds the increased role of the United Nations in fostering democracy and good governance, not only through assistance in holding credible elections, but through a wide range of activities to promote democratic institutions and practices. The United Nations Democracy Fund, which has already funded over 100 projects around the globe, is a notable example. The United Nations has also been an important stakeholder in the success of the new or restored democracies process.

Global challenges require global approaches, and no other body is better equipped to serve as the steering house of the collective efforts of the international community than the United Nations. The United Nations is the world's most universal, legitimate and authoritative organization. It is a true political centre of global cooperation. It gives us legitimacy. It gives us legality.

Our world Organization has embarked on a process of reform in order to better respond to the multifaceted challenges, both existing and emerging, in this era of rapid globalization and its ensuing growing complexities. Progress has been made in several reform areas, yet greater efforts, combined with stronger political will, are needed to follow through with reforms related especially to the system-wide coherence of the United Nations and the Security Council. Mongolia has full confidence in Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and supports his efforts aimed at improving the management, efficiency and internal cohesion of the United Nations system.

Our success as a community of nations in tackling the challenges of climate change, achieving the MDGs and other internationally agreed development goals, countering terrorism, preventing conflicts, promoting democracy and human rights, and effectively addressing other pressing issues of today largely depends on the success of that transformation.

The clock is ticking. We cannot afford to pursue business as usual. If we are to honour, in good faith and on time, the pledges and commitments we made to our peoples, we must redouble our concerted efforts to win this historic race.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Aïchatou Mindaoudou, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Cooperation and African Integration of the Niger.

Mrs. Mindaoudou (Niger) (*spoke in French*): Allow me at the outset to congratulate Mr. Kerim most warmly on his outstanding election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-second session. We are convinced that his professional qualities and his vast and rich academic, diplomatic and business experience will lead to the success of our work. I therefore assure him of my delegation's fullest support in the discharge of his mandate.

With respect to outgoing President Sheikha Haya Rashed Al-Khalifa, I wish to express our great satisfaction at her dynamic and skilful handling of the work of the previous session.

As to the Secretary-General, I take this opportunity to reiterate the Niger Government's admiration and encouragement on his assumption of the leadership of our collective Organization.

Two years after the 2005 World Summit, which gave our leaders an opportunity to address the challenges and threats confronting humankind, we cannot help feeling optimistic — despite the persistence of such scourges as international terrorism or the slow progress towards fulfilling the Millennium Development Goals — as we consider the unflagging willingness of the international community resolutely to seek solutions consonant with the threats that have been identified.

In the field of international peace and security, one element of the significant developments in certain parts of the world is, without a doubt, the positive impact of the Peacebuilding Commission, in particular

in Burundi and Sierra Leone. That alone makes the creation of that new body worthwhile. In Africa, such positive and encouraging trends can be witnessed in the hope raised by developments in certain conflict areas.

In West Africa, Liberia continues to move ahead with national reconstruction and consolidation of peace.

In Côte d'Ivoire, the peace process has shown great promise since the Ouagadougou agreement was signed in March 2007 and a "flame of peace" ceremony took place. Those two major events bear witness to the parties' will to put a permanent end to the crisis that exploded in that country five years ago.

Sierra Leone, for the first time, and after a long period of instability, has organized free and transparent legislative and presidential elections, bearing witness to the resolve of the suffering people of that country to move beyond tragedy and to resolutely build a bright future.

In Central Africa, the adoption by the Great Lakes countries of the Pact on Security, Stability and Development leads us to expect, in the medium term, a meaningful improvement in the troubled situation that has prevailed there for some years now. It is encouraging to note that Burundi is already at the point where it can do without the international community's supervision in peacekeeping efforts within its borders and to devote itself fully to the task of economic and social development.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is another case in which we will allow ourselves to have great hopes if all the parties join in the peace movement and take part in the ongoing democratic process.

In Darfur, the situation remains worrisome to be sure, but thanks to the agreement between the Government of the Sudan and the United Nations and the adoption of Security Council resolution 1769 (2007) on 31 July, we hope that there will soon be a return to peace and security in that part of the Sudan.

In Western Sahara, we are gratified by the initiation of direct negotiations between Morocco and the POLISARIO Front, including the two meetings held under the aegis of the Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General subsequent to the adoption of Security Council resolution 1754 (2007).

Finally, with regard to Somalia, we earnestly hope that the national reconciliation conference and the efforts of the international community will yield positive results and enable that brother country to emerge forever from the crisis that has prevailed there for years.

The situation in the Middle East, dominated by the Israel-Palestine conflict, requires more focused attention by the international community. My delegation feels that the resumption of the political process remains the only way to move towards a just and lasting solution, on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions and the principle of two viable States living side by side in peace and security. The Quartet Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative remain frames of reference in this regard.

Generally speaking, the coherent subregional approach employed by the United Nations and the subregional organizations seems well suited to handling conflicts, and also to responding to other concerns, such as international migration, trafficking in human beings, trafficking in drugs, transnational crime and the proliferation and spread of small arms and light weapons. From this perspective, in particular as regards the African continent, the capacity of subregional organizations and the African Union should be reinforced.

The United Nations Ten-year Capacity-Building Programme for the African Union is to be commended, as it opens new possibilities for conflict prevention and the maintenance of lasting peace on the continent, in particular through the creation of an African intervention force. Along these lines, the open debates of the Security Council on strengthening the role of the Council in conflict prevention and resolution, in particular in Africa, are of great importance.

Conflicts are not the only threats to international peace and security. Other phenomena, sometimes more devastating and unforeseeable, threaten the ability of peoples around the world to enjoy their legitimate right to peace and security. Those phenomena include international terrorism, transnational crime and all types of trafficking.

In this connection, the Sahara, a geographical zone that the Niger shares with several other African countries, is becoming a den of drug and arms traffickers, fuelling and perpetuating insecurity in the region. The Niger intends to participate intensively in any effort to enhance the international community's efforts to eradicate that scourge, which undermines the

economies of the countries concerned and threatens the foundations of democracy.

In that regard, my delegation considers international cooperation and assistance for affected developing countries to be indispensable if we are to succeed in combating drug trafficking and trafficking in small arms and light weapons, including anti-tank and anti-personnel mines. These are used by armed groups to continue to inflict untold suffering on innocent civilians, obstruct trade and hinder all development activities in infested areas. The scope and gravity of the phenomenon truly require that the international community give it all due attention and firmly condemn the criminal acts being carried out by these networks of traffickers, in particular in our region.

The linkage between peace, security, development and human rights, spelled out in the 2005 World Summit Outcome (resolution 60/1), has lost none of its relevance and continues to fuel our thinking. That is why the Niger continues to feel a sense of solidarity for all initiatives, present or future, designed to give new momentum to development efforts.

Niger welcomes the initiative of the informal thematic debate entitled "Partnerships towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals: Taking stock, moving forward", held on 27 November 2006 and the first in a series of three debates organized by the General Assembly in the context of its revitalization process. On that occasion, some development partners were able to undertake concrete commitments, such as that of the Islamic Development Bank, which announced the creation of a poverty mitigation fund endowed with a $10 billion budget. The Government of the Niger, through me, would like to commend that exemplary initiative, which is part of an ever more effective development partnership.

The Niger sees the General Assembly's adoption of resolution of 61/16 on strengthening the role of the Economic and Social Council as a great step forward. The resolution names the Economic and Social Council as a principal body responsible for economic and social development and, in particular, for the implementation of the international development goals agreed at the major United Nations conferences and summits, including the Millennium Development Goals.

We congratulate the State of Qatar on having hosted the preparatory meeting for the Monterrey Consensus review conference, to be held in Doha in 2008. Moreover, the unparalleled commitment of the Government of Qatar to international development led it to host the Conference on Consolidating Food Security in Niger, which was held in Doha with the support of the Organization of the Islamic Conference and proved most successful. I therefore take this privileged moment at the rostrum of the General Assembly at its sixty-second session to reiterate the profound gratitude of the people and Government of the Niger to that friendly country, the entire Islamic *ummah* and all other partners who kindly supported that initiative.

The international community should pay particular attention to one category of countries that is even more vulnerable. I am referring to land-locked developing countries, whose geography puts them at a great disadvantage. In 2003, the Almaty Conference, having considered their situation, adopted a Declaration and Programme of Action, the implementation of which is soon to be reviewed. The time has therefore come to launch an urgent appeal to all development partners to resolve to take the necessary measures not only to help those countries to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, but also to enable them to mitigate the negative impacts of desertification, environmental degradation and climate change.

Desertification and the deteriorating environment are two problems that seriously affect the countries of the Sahel, including mine. The combined efforts of the international community effectively to combat those scourges should be stepped up. The action taken by the Niger, based on the experience gained through the special programme launched by the President of the Republic, has allowed us to achieve spectacular successes that deserve to be consolidated and strengthened.

Thanks to the work to restore degraded soil, remove sand and reforest the landscape undertaken over the past few years and stepped up in the framework of that programme, 3 million hectares have been reclaimed from the desert, according to satellite monitoring undertaken in 2006 and transmitted by the regional Agrimet centre. Large expanses that were desperately arid have now become productive

agricultural areas and pasture land thanks to water-retention and infiltration activities that have raised the water table. It is worth noting that such activities are being carried out by several thousand young people being paid through a cash-for-work programme.

The public debate in the Security Council and the thematic debate in the General Assembly dedicated to climate change highlighted the scope and gravity of the phenomenon by emphasizing the need for urgent collective action. The eloquent statements made at the high-level meeting organized by the Secretary-General on 24 September lead us to believe that the parties are willing to move to achieve essential objectives, which is the only way to secure a wholesome and reliable environment for present and future generations. The Niger resolutely supports that momentum and, within its national strategy and plan of action for climate change and viability, has drafted a national programme of action for adaptation to climate change.

All such questions, which fall within the context of a comprehensive vision of sustainable development, are covered in our revised poverty reduction strategy, which is the reference framework for my country's overall economic and development policy. I take this exceptional opportunity solemnly to invite all our development partners to participate in the international conference on the Niger's revised poverty reduction strategy, to be held in Brussels in October. The conference has been called, inter alia, to harmonize and coordinate the contributions of our development partners.

Harmonization and coordination are topical issues in the United Nations. They are essential to increasing the Organization's effectiveness in collective action to address global challenges and threats. My delegation agrees that system-wide coherence in United Nations activities should be a principal focus for the implementation of reforms advocated in the Outcome Document of the 2005 World Summit. We must therefore find the means to implement them. I note that we see such reforms as a way of better helping developing countries to achieve lasting economic growth, develop sustainably and eradicate poverty.

That is the vision that leads me to reaffirm the Niger's conviction that coherence and coordination must be inspired by the cardinal principles of ownership, national leadership and respect for national development priorities.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Rita Kieber-Beck, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Liechtenstein.

Mrs. Kieber-Beck (Liechtenstein): Climate change, at the centre of the high-level event a week ago, constitutes one of the greatest challenges of our generation. It puts to the test our ability to create the collective political will necessary to counter a phenomenon of potentially disastrous socio-economic consequences. It also offers a great opportunity to make the best use of the unique framework that this Organization provides. The Bali meeting must bring about a long-term commitment by all States to launching an ambitious and practical road map towards a gradually decarbonized global economy. We can reach that goal if we translate today's political momentum into concrete action that goes beyond tomorrow's activities.

Climate change is but one of the areas of concern to the international community, where it is absolutely clear that the United Nations is today more than ever an indispensable Organization. It appears indeed that its unique nature and potential are more widely recognized and accepted today than they were until even very recently. In the words of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, the pendulum is swinging back in our favour. As a strong believer in multilateralism, we welcome that development.

However, as true friends of the United Nations, we must also continue to question the ability of the Organization to fully use its potential and to fulfil the purposes and principles of its Charter. Our record in the area of reform, two years after the 2005 World Summit, is mixed. We yet have to achieve certain institutional reforms, and the principle of the responsibility to protect must be translated into concrete action, such as in the case of the oppressive policies of the regime in Myanmar against its own population. Of course, however, reform of an organization with tasks as diverse and daunting as the United Nations is never concluded. We must always be prepared to make the adjustments that are necessary to improve its impact, its legitimacy and its efficiency. Today, such adjustments require a two-fold approach. On the one hand, we must strengthen its operational parts and, on the other hand, we must ground the work of the Organization more firmly in its origins, namely, the Charter of the United Nations.

The demands in the area of peacekeeping are greater than ever before. That attests to the faith placed in the United Nations, but it also makes the deficiencies in the management of the Organization a more pressing issue. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon was therefore right to propose changes to strengthen institutional support for the Organization's field activities. We look forward to further progress in that respect, in particular in the area of procurement. We are not convinced that the lessons from the oil-for-food scandal, which has done great damage to the United Nations, have been fully absorbed, let alone fully translated into concrete action. We must also credibly improve the financial efficiency and accountability of the Organization. That will, in turn, allow us to present to our domestic constituencies the ever-increasing bills for peacekeeping operations.

All the strengthening of the operational and managerial capabilities of the United Nations will not change the fact that, operationally and financially, this is not a powerful Organization. Its budget will always pale in comparison to what a number of States spend on their defence budgets, to cite an obvious example. The genuine power and strength of the Organization lies in its foundation in international law. The Charter itself can be regarded as the greatest achievement in the history of international law. More important, though, the United Nations has the unique ability to bestow legitimacy and legality on international action. In the eyes of the world, the United Nations symbolizes the rule of law in international relations.

That is a tremendous asset that we must cherish and promote wherever possible. The United Nations and its organs must always be seen as the guardians of international law. Given its central place in the institutional architecture of the Organization, that applies in particular to the Security Council. The current practice of the Council with respect to the listing and de-listing of individuals targeted by sanctions is therefore a cause for concern. We believe that disregarding international standards of due process does nothing to improve the effectiveness of sanctions regimes, but much to undermine the authority of the Council itself.

Long years and much energy have been spent on the reform of the Security Council. It would appear today that we are as far from a solution as ever. We believe that the legitimacy of the Council's actions has a number of sources, the most important of which are the quality of its decisions and the extent to which they reflect international law. In addition, the decisions of the Council have the necessary legitimacy if they are genuinely taken on behalf of the membership as a whole, and therefore also on behalf of the vast majority of States that do not serve on the Council. That can be achieved through greater involvement by non-member States, in particular if and when their interests are directly affected. Finally, of course, the membership of the Council must be more representative of the overall membership of the Organization, and of the developing world in particular.

The past few years have not brought about the era of the rule of law that some had hoped for. Quite to the contrary, there have been concerted, and ultimately unsuccessful, attacks on the importance of the rule of law in international relations. Nevertheless, we have achieved very significant progress in some areas, in particular in the area of international criminal justice. The Security Council has led the way through the establishment of international and hybrid tribunals. But the crowning success, of course, was the establishment of the International Criminal Court (ICC).

The referral of the situation in Darfur to the Court was a landmark decision, both legally and politically. It was a strong message by the Security Council that the international community does not accept impunity for the most serious crimes under international law. That message, however, needs to be backed up by enforcement action, in particular by the arrest of all indictees sought by the Court. We therefore call on all States and the United Nations to cooperate with the ICC to that end.

We will continue to take great interest in the work of the Security Council. At the same time, of course, we will focus our energy on making the General Assembly a more relevant and more essential part of the United Nations system. In that regard, my delegation looks forward to the President's leadership and to closely cooperating with him on the priority issues he has identified.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Karel de Gucht, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Belgium.

Mr. De Gucht (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): We live in an increasingly complex world of ever more diverse challenges. Actions taken in isolation are no longer enough. Given such complexity, the United

Nations should not only be a bulwark against arbitrary actions in international relations but also, above all, the vehicle for effective responses. I am pleased to note that there is growing consensus on this issue.

Climate change was the topic of a recent high-level event. A Security Council summit meeting has just addressed the situation in Africa. In addition to peace and international security, the United Nations must also tackle a wide array of issues. The fight against terrorism, pandemics, human rights, disarmament, migration and the environment are examples of the diverse subjects requiring a multilateral approach.

Multilateralism has been reinvigorated, especially in the areas of peacekeeping and security. The current 18 peacekeeping missions and the 100,000 Blue Helmets now in the field clearly attest to that. Belgium has witnessed that evolution up close since becoming a member of the Security Council at the beginning of 2007. We shall continue to strengthen multilateralism in that body.

In Africa, working through the United Nations, the international community has been actively engaged in the search for solutions to the issues of Darfur, Chad, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Côte d'Ivoire.

The efforts of the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC) have been crucial to re-establishing peace and setting up democratic institutions in that country. Now is not the time to scale back our efforts. The tenuous situation in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the resumption of fighting in North Kivu pose serious risks to the process of stabilizing the country. They also have tragic humanitarian consequences. Moreover, the scourge of the recruitment of child soldiers takes on new proportions. As pointed out by the Secretary-General, we urgently need a global solution, including a regional dimension that will allow us to make better use of MONUC's input. While the Congolese authorities are preparing for local elections, which will strengthen democratic culture across the country, they need our full support. Belgium will continue to mobilize the attention of the international community on this important matter.

In Sudan, it is imperative that we make progress in our search for a political solution for Darfur. I encourage all parties to take advantage of the Tripoli conference in order to identify the elements of the conflict, such as the distribution of resources and power-sharing, and to establish the foundation for a lasting settlement. We need to speed up the deployment of the peacekeeping force, with the full cooperation of the Sudanese Government. Moreover, we will have to continue to consolidate reconciliation between north and south of the country.

Furthermore, the role of regional organizations in managing crises has significantly increased over the past year. The African Union has invested its efforts, both in Somalia and in Darfur, where new ways of cooperation with the United Nations are developing. The hybrid force is an example of this new form of cooperation.

As for the European Union, it has supported MONUC's efforts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It will also contribute to curbing the humanitarian crisis in Chad and in the Central African Republic by sending a military force to support the United Nations missions in the region. Belgium will participate in this effort. The European Union has also developed a close cooperation with the African Union by supporting its efforts in crisis management, while paying close attention to the strengthening of its effectiveness. On the whole, we welcome this regional input and the increasing synergies among the United Nations, the African Union and the European Union.

Regarding Kosovo, it is, on the other hand, regrettable that the Security Council was unable last June to assume its responsibility on a matter for which the solution is essential for peace and stability in Europe. I urge both parties to seize this present opportunity to come to a compromise. This is a matter of urgency. The status quo is not an option, as we are all aware. Absent an agreement between the parties, Europe will then have to shoulder its responsibilities.

In the Middle East, the international community has mobilized in order to contribute to a solution to the crisis in Lebanon. By extending for one year the mandate of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), in which Belgium participates with close to 400 troops, it has recognized UNIFIL's role in the solution of the crisis.

But the current political stalemate is alarming. All parties should demonstrate a sense of responsibility. The institutions should be allowed to function normally

again, beginning with the election of the president in accordance with the constitutional process, in the assigned timetable and without foreign interference. The latest attack that claimed the lives of member of Parliament Antoine Ghanem and nine other people shows how impunity threatens the stability of the country. The establishment of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon is clear evidence of the support that the multilateral system is willing to provide to the fight against this impunity.

In the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, neither the continuation of firing rockets at the Israeli population, nor the deterioration of the living conditions of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, is acceptable. Regular meetings between the Palestinian and Israeli leaders constitute an encouraging development after so many years of misunderstanding and lack of true dialogue. I hope that these steps will be bear fruit at the international meeting slated for before the end of this year. Belgium actively supports any progress in the peace process.

The Security Council has recently reinforced the mandate of the United Nations in Iraq. The United Nations can, in fact, play an important role in humanitarian emergency matters, in regional cooperation and in national reconciliation. But its action will depend on the security conditions and will have to be able to rely truly on the support of the international community, the Iraqi Government and the neighbouring countries, as expressed at the 22 September meeting.

In dealing with the nuclear issue in Iran, Belgium has, from the outset, supported a multilateral approach. We have to resolutely use the multilateral mechanisms such as the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the Security Council, in order to obtain tangible results. In the past, Iran has not fulfilled its obligations regarding the transparency of its nuclear activities. In order to restore confidence and to make the best use of the objective verification capacities of the IAEA, Iran will have to fully respect the regulations of the Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement and the Additional Protocol. However, the measures prescribed in Security Council resolutions go beyond those regulations and aim at creating the conditions for restoring international confidence in the Iranian nuclear programme. Complete and immediate compliance with these resolutions by Iran is a condition to resume the dialogue that had to be interrupted in 2005. The credibility of the Security Council is also at stake.

In Asia, the mission of good offices of the Secretary-General has made it possible for us to follow closely the situation in Myanmar. The latest demonstrations show the determination of the population and should finally incite the Government to initiate an inclusive dialogue with a view to restoring democracy in Myanmar. Use of violence will not be tolerated.

Beyond crisis resolution, progress has also been made in the area of peacebuilding. The international community must remain vigilant. The cost of leaving a country too quickly is always higher than investing in peacebuilding. The true success of the Peacebuilding Commission will be judged by the long-term stability of the countries currently on its agenda, namely, Burundi and Sierra Leone.

The recent adoption of concrete recommendations following the deterioration of the political situation in Burundi illustrates its increasing capacity to react quickly to events that could jeopardize the stabilization of the countries with which it is dealing. In Burundi, the dialogue must definitely be pursued in order to solve the political stalemate, which impedes the normal functioning of the State's institutions. Every effort must be made in order to bring the Forces nationales de libération (FNL) back to constructive negotiations with the Government as soon as possible.

Three of the most recent and expensive peacekeeping operations have been deployed in countries where conflicts were fuelled by the illegal exploitation of natural resources, namely, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia and Sierra Leone. That clearly illustrates the urgent need to develop mechanisms that break the link between the illegal exploitation of natural resources and conflict.

This issue was the central theme of our presidency of the Security Council last June. We identified several courses of action. For example, we must reinforce the capacity of the Secretariat to deal with such issues; define more precisely, as necessary, the mandates of peacekeeping operations; cause the sanctions committees to operate in a more targeted manner; and consolidate the methods of the work of experts groups. In the coming months, it is our intention to pursue our efforts in these areas, which relate to both security and development. We hope that we can rely on the support of Member States.

Our attention to crisis management and peacebuilding must not diminish the importance that we accord to preventive diplomacy. I welcome the initiatives of the Secretary-General in this area, such as strengthening United Nations mediation capacities and upgrading the mandates concerning prevention of genocide and mass atrocities and concerning responsibility to protect. We also have to make this concept operational.

Conflict affects civilian populations long after the end of hostilities. The prevention of conflict should not overlook human security. That is why our country is working to promote an international instrument on cluster bombs; that is why it supports negotiations on a treaty on arms trafficking, and that is also why we are pursuing action against the recruitment and use of child soldiers.

Crisis prevention also entails development. Everyone should have the opportunity to choose his or her way in life with dignity. The alternative is frustration that often leads only to violence. The Millennium Development Goals and the fight against poverty therefore remain a major challenge.

In this context, Belgium pays special attention to good governance. Last March, in cooperation with the World Bank and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, we organized in Brussels an international conference on good governance and the fight against corruption. That conference illustrated the potential in this area — triangular partnerships among donor countries, recipient countries and the private sector — which needs to be explored, including within the United Nations.

Poverty also forces many migrants to leave their country, having no other choice. In July 2007, Belgium organized, in the presence of the Secretary-General, the first Global Forum on Migration and Development. That was a new opportunity to demonstrate our firm multilateral commitment. It emerged that legal migration can be an opportunity for both the countries of origin and the countries of destination. In addition, with good cooperation between the countries involved, development can also foster migration by choice rather than by necessity. Belgium will contribute to the follow-up of this initiative with the Philippines, which will organize the second Global Forum in 2008.

Human rights are one of the pillars of our collective security. We must ensure respect for those rights under all circumstances. That is why in 2005 we emphasized the need for in-depth reform of the former Commission on Human Rights. At this stage, however, I regretfully note that the new Human Rights Council does not meet our expectations. An institutional agreement that was reached between the members of the Human Rights Council in Geneva in June came at the expense of difficult concessions. The capacity of the Council to react promptly to human rights violations will thus be compromised.

Multilateralism is back. Nevertheless, it is only a method, not an end in itself, and this method can be disappointing if it does not bring results. We therefore need an instrument that will animate multilateralism and adapt the United Nations to the current environment. Achieving our common objectives depends on developing a modern organization that is well adapted, well equipped and well managed. We will therefore need to consolidate the bases for a responsible and professional Secretariat.

System-wide coherence in the United Nations is also indispensable from this standpoint. In order to foster coherence of development activities by the United Nations in the field, the current reform effort has as its main objective to reinforce its efficiency for the benefit of developing countries.

After years of discussion, it is unfortunate that we have not been able to make progress on the indispensable reform of the Security Council. We undoubtedly need a new working method that would allow us to get the technical working group out of New York, where it is bogged down, and to involve the capitals and the political levels more. I therefore suggest appointing a high-level special envoy for Security Council reform, who would be responsible for leading these consultations and for presenting us with a proposal.

As far as I am concerned, my clear preference goes to a formula that would consist initially of an addition of new, semi-permanent seats, without modifying the current balance between permanent and non-permanent members. Later on, permanent members would accept to give up their right of veto.

The United Nations must serve the general interest of the community of Member States, as well as of the populations they represent. The United Nations will succeed only if those States manage to transcend the sum of their particular interests. It is the shared

responsibility of each of us to display the necessary vision in order to put our Organization in the service of the common good.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Archbishop Dominique Mamberti, Secretary for Relations with States of the Holy See.

Archbishop Mamberti (Holy See): Mr. President, the Holy See takes this opportunity to congratulate you on your election and looks forward to working with you. At the same time, it is my pleasure to greet the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon, and wish him well at his first full session of the General Assembly.

Less than a year ago, the General Assembly approved the project to renovate these United Nations Headquarters. Such material renovation seems an appropriate reminder for States of the need to be constantly renewed in the pursuit of the great objectives that inspired the creation of the Organization of the United Nations.

Sixty-two years ago, the United Nations was established in order to save future generations from the scourge of war, to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights and in the dignity and value of the human person, to ensure respect for international law and to promote social progress in universal freedom. Today, once more, we must reaffirm those values in order to deliver a forceful "no" to war and an equally forceful "yes" to human dignity.

The Preamble of the Charter of the United Nations, in its reference to the fundamental rights and the dignity of the human person, uses the word "faith" and links it to dialogue and cooperation among nations. In this way it is affirmed that there is such a thing as universal and transcendent truth about man and his innate dignity, which is not only prior to all political activity but determines it, so that no ideology of power can eliminate it.

This innate dignity also determines the just measure of national interests, which may never be considered absolute, and in defence of which not only is it never right to harm the legitimate interests of other States, but there is an obligation at the same time to help promote the common good of all people. Respect for human dignity, therefore, is the deepest ethical foundation in the search for peace and in the building up of international relations corresponding to the authentic needs and hopes of all the peoples of the Earth. To forget or to accept partially and selectively that principle is what lies at the origin of conflict, environmental degradation and social and economic injustice.

The terrorist attacks that marked the beginning of the twenty-first century have given rise to pessimistic visions of humanity based on a supposed clash of civilizations. At times, people respond by returning to extreme forms of nationalism, or by extending justification for the use of force, or by further relativizing values essentially tied to human dignity, in particular the universal right to life and to religious freedom.

Nowadays, the binomial "culture and religion" is increasingly heard in this Hall. The Holy See welcomes the initiative to hold a High-level Dialogue on Interreligious and Intercultural Understanding and Cooperation for Peace, which will take place here on 5 October under the leadership of the General Assembly President. Indeed, dialogue among peoples of different cultures and religions is not an option; it is something that is indispensable for peace and for the renewal of international life.

The Holy See hopes that the increased interest on the part of non-religious bodies and institutions will contribute to a greater respect for religious freedom everywhere. Today, the right to religious freedom continues to be disregarded, and even violated, in certain places. Such violations have become a pretext for various other forms of discrimination. If religious leaders and believers expect States and societies to respect them and acknowledge their religions to be true instruments of peace, they themselves must respect religious freedom; they must show that they pledge to promote peace and shun violence; they must demonstrate that religion is not and must not become a pretext for conflict; and they must declare without ambiguity that to promote violence or to wage war in the name of religion is a blatant contradiction.

At the difficult crossroads at which humanity finds itself today, the use of force no longer represents a sustainable solution. It is important to help the Conference on Disarmament find a way out of the impasse in which it has been languishing for more than a decade, to relieve the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons from the severe strain to which it has been increasingly subjected lately, and to give new

impetus to recognizing the value of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. This year's fiftieth anniversary of the entry into force of the Statute of the International Atomic Energy Agency is a most fitting occasion to reaffirm our commitment to a peaceful future through the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, the reduction and definitive dismantling of existing nuclear weapons and the non-discriminatory, peaceful and safe use of nuclear technology.

Moreover, this Organization must take further steps on arms control in the field of conventional weapons, including small arms and light weapons. The Holy See associates itself with all appeals that underline the importance of adopting a common approach aimed at combating not only illegal traffic in such weapons but also other connected activities, such as terrorism, organized crime and trafficking in drugs and in precious raw materials.

Another important area in which the Holy See urges serious and effective action on the part of the international community is that of cluster munitions. A rapid response to this problem is becoming an ethical imperative because of the high cost in human life, the majority of the victims being civilians, especially children.

This Organization has expressed its willingness many times to devote more resources to conflict prevention, particularly in the area of mediation. In this regard, the Holy See has a particular interest in the efforts of the Department of Political Affairs to create a standing team of expert mediators as part of the Secretary-General's goal to make more effective use of his good offices for conflict prevention. While the multiplication of peace operations could mean that there has been a failure to prevent conflict situations from erupting into full-scale armed conflicts, it is also a sign of the trust that the international community places in the mechanisms of the United Nations and in their cooperation with regional agencies. In this context, we look forward to the day that peacekeeping efforts in Darfur will finally be fully operational.

I wish to recall the contribution of the United Nations towards a just and final solution to the conflicts that for too long have caused bloodshed in the Middle East. There is need for renewed commitment on the part of all Member countries in the pacification and reconstruction of long-suffering Iraq, a reconstruction that is more moral and political than economic. There is a need for renewed commitment in the search for a solution through dialogue of the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians, one which is capable of recognizing the legitimate expectations of each side.

Renewed commitment is needed in ensuring that Lebanon will continue to be a free and independent country, a democratic, multicultural and multi-confessional society, equitable and respectful of all people and of the various trends present in its midst, like a common home open to others. This is particularly necessary in the present crucial period leading to an election of the new head of State.

Finally, I cannot but make reference to what is happening in Myanmar, which these days occupies the attention and concerns of the General Assembly and of the whole international community. I wish to reiterate the appeal made yesterday by Pope Benedict XVI: through dialogue, good will and a spirit of humanity, may a solution to the crisis be found quickly for the good of the country and a better future for all its inhabitants.

The creation two years ago of the Peacebuilding Commission was based upon the conviction that it is not enough to put an end to wars, but it is also necessary to help reconstruct individual lives and the social and institutional fabric. Now, the biggest test for the international community is to give the Peacebuilding Commission the mandate and the means to prove on the ground that it can successfully manage and support the difficult transition from war and misery to peace and development.

Many of the problems that are attributed today almost exclusively to cultural and religious differences have their origin in economic and social injustice. Freedom from want, illness, hunger and ignorance is a necessary precondition for a serene dialogue of civilizations. Forty years ago, in his encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, Pope Paul VI stated that development is the new name for peace. The Holy See is concerned about the inability of rich countries to offer the poorest countries, especially those in Africa, financial and trade conditions capable of promoting their sustainable development.

I salute the high-level event on climate change held here on 24 September. The Holy See wishes to underline once again the moral imperative incumbent

upon each and every one of us in safeguarding the environment — our fundamental common good.

We are approaching the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, yet many have never heard of it or been given the benefits of its principles. Those rights are not based on the mere will of human beings, or in the reality of the State or in public powers, but rather are grounded in the objective requirements of the nature bestowed on man.

The most important part of our work in that context is to ensure that the right to life is respected everywhere. That fundamental right must be protected from conception until natural death. Therefore, we must work to stop and reverse the culture of death embraced by some social and legal structures that try to make the suppression of life acceptable by disguising it as a medical or social service. In that sense, the abolition of the death penalty should also be seen as a consequence of full respect for the right to life.

The legitimate quest for equality between men and women has achieved positive results. Nevertheless, inequalities in the exercise of basic human rights unfortunately still persist in many places. That leads to a breakdown in the social fabric and results in women's objectification and exploitation. The vindication of equality needs to be accompanied by the awareness that it goes hand in hand with and does not endanger, much less contradict, the recognition of both the difference and the complementarity between men and women.

The Holy See looks forward to the commemorative high-level meeting on the follow-up to the outcome of the special session on children, scheduled for 11 and 12 December 2007. It will be an opportunity to refocus our commitments to children and to redouble our efforts to promote their rights, end violence against them and support the family.

Faith in human dignity demands that the problem of migration be approached in the context of human rights, family rights and children's rights. While it is essential to fight human trafficking and legitimate to curb illegal migration, no one can justify measures which put lives at risk or gravely offend human dignity and human rights. The Holy See welcomes the momentum created by the first meeting of the Global Forum on Migration and Development, held in Brussels in July, and looks forward to more progress in that regard.

We must continue to ensure that peace and security and development and human rights are effectively combined and mutually reinforcing, in order to show the international community that the renovation of United Nations Headquarters is not only physical, but also a renewal of the Organization's ideals and intentions. A renewal that reaches into the deepest corners of the Organization is one in which all nations of the world will rightly take pride.

Programme of work

The Acting President: Before proceeding further, I wish to draw the attention of the General Assembly to document A/INF/62/4, which contains the programme of work of the Assembly and schedule of plenary meetings for the period from October to December 2007 and which has been distributed desk to desk. I wish to inform Members that the list of speakers for the items listed in A/INF/62/4 are open.

The meeting rose at 1.35 p.m.